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The mark of an MB (HL)

Azmi M. Anshar in Blantyre (Malawi)

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he took a long time to pick the new Selangor Menteri Besar and finally settled for former Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Abu Hassan Omar because he wanted somebody capable and clean.

"I wanted to make sure I picked the right successor ... somebody who is clean, somebody whom I know and who has got the capability to do the job," he told a joint Press conference with President Bikili Muluzi at the end of his three-day visit to Malawi.

Dr Mahathir only allowed three questions by Malaysian journalists on the appointment of Abu Hassan giving Malawian journalists more time to query him on Malaysian-Malawi trade relations.

In response to those questions, his answers took the form of an explanation to Muluzi, his officials and the Malawian journalists of the domestic politics of Malaysia.

"Recently, one of the Chief Ministers of the most important State in the country resigned (on April 14)," he said.

"Since his resignation, I did not appoint a successor because I wanted to make sure I picked the right successor ... somebody who is clean, somebody I know ... and who has got the capability.

"And I have chosen a Minister from my Cabinet to become the new Chief Minister of the State," he said.

"He has to resign from the Cabinet and has to stand for election for a State seat. Should he win, he will be the new Chief Minister of Selangor".

Asked whether there would be time for him to appoint the new Menteri Besar as the Selangor Constitution requires that the Prime Minister appoint one 28 days after the date of resignation, Dr Mahathir said: "I think we still have a little bit of time. I think it is not yet 28 days. The election will take about nine days in all. I don't know ... my addition is not that good."

When it was pointed out that Abu Hassan's appointment would be based on the assumption that he would win, Dr Mahathir said: "Well, if he loses, I will have to pick somebody else, I suppose." This was greeted with laughter, also from Malawians.

"Any candidates from among you?" he asked the Malaysian journalists covering his State visit.

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